DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 645 CE 056 378

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TITLE The Paradox of Critical Practice: A Case Study.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Salt Lake City, UT, October 28-November 3, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Agency Cooperation; *Community Attitudes; *Community Centers; Community Control; Community Education; *Community Resources; Community Satisfaction; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; Local History; Middle Schools; Public Health; Public Libraries; *School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Oklahoma

ABSTRACT

The Bagby, Oklahoma, Human Resources Center was conceived in the mid-1970s as a model of community education and unified services. It was built with federal grant money to serve as a middle school, library, human services office, and meeting space for Bagby, a growing town of about 5,000. As envisioned, it was to serve all parts of the population, with a gymnasium for recreation, a library for both adults and children, adult education and job training, senior citizens meals and recreation, and many of the human services needed by disadvantaged people. Ten years later, however, interviews with townspeople and observation of the uses of the building showed that the dream has not been fulfilled. Although a middle school, a library, and a health service operate in the building, it has not become the community center that was proposed. Each of the units operates separately. There is little integration of personnel or services, and each of the major entities, the school and library, thinks of the building as "theirs." No director of the facility was hired to coordinate activities; the middle school refuses to let community groups use "their" gym, and the library makes strict rules about the use of "their" meeting room. In addition, the building was built away from the center of town, where the majority of the people needing human services live, and little input was gathered from the community about its needs prior to construction. The Bagby disappointment points out the paradox of the philosophy of adult education: If it is meant to empower adults, as has been maintained, then it cannot be "owned" by the schools or other authorities. (21 references) (KC)

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# THE PARADOX OF CRITICAL PRACTICE:

## A CASE STUDY

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A paper presented at the meeting of the
American Association of Adult and Continuing Education,
Salt Lake City, Utah, October/November, 1990

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## Prologue

There will not be any other name on the building except what you see on the architect's drawing: Bagby Human Resources Center. And I think it is significant that we don't put any other name on it. I hope that's the way it goes because that's what it is! A Human Resources Center. It's not a school or a library. It is a new kind of facility that houses several agencies .... Now certainly there's a -- to be realistic everybody knows that from dream to reality is a long time, a long gap and there's many a pitfall in between. And certainly, we don't conceive of this facility from the first day it's opened serving all the needs of the community or doing all the things or being involved in all the kinds of programs that we would hope that it would develop into but these are things that are going to take us at least five years to develop. (M. T. Byers, 1977.)

Excerpt from field notes, March, 1987 -- downtown Bagby:

LA: Excuse me, could you give me directions to the Human Resources Center?

Woman behind counter in bakery: The Human Resources Center? Ummm, I don't know, I **think** it's -- just a minute. (She leans back and shouts to someone in the back room.) Honey, where's the Human Resources Center?

Isn't it out by the library? (Receiving an affirmative answer, she leans across the counter again.) Yes, it's out by the library, do you know where that is? Out by the schools?

LA: Yes, but is it in the same building as the library?

Woman: Ummm, I think it's in front of the library.

Actually, the woman in the above transcription was exceptional; other people of whom I inquired had either never heard of the Human Resources Center, or they directed me to the Multipurpose Center at the opposite end of town which is the site of the community gymnasium, swimming pool, and tennis courts. Truly, for the Bagby Human Resources Center (HRC), the reality has not matched the dream, and in fact the dream may have been forgotten by all except M. T. Byers.

## The Setting

The HRC in Bagby is a 52,000 square foot facility which houses the middle school (complete with gymnasium and auditorium), the public library and school library combined, a community meeting room (with kitchen), the county Public Health Department, and the Board of Education. It is a long, low building, set back off the road on a piece of gently sloping land in what is mainly a residential area of town. The elementary school is right next door. In the middle of the circular drive in front of the HRC is a grassy soccer field, and the drive also continues around the back

of the facility to where the track and other playing fields are located. The front face of the building evidences only one floor, but if you follow the drive around to the back you will see that the building is actually two stories, set into the hill, and the middle school occupies the bottom floor.

The library and the community meeting room occupy 9,400 square feet, while the other agency offices encompass only 2,100 square feet; the rest is primarily the middle school. Looking in from the front doors, the upper floor is laid out roughly like an inverted T, with agency offices forming the cross bar and the library being the stem. The community room can be accessed either from the front hall or from inside the library.

The town of Bagby seems incongruous with this facility. Bagby is the kind of small (population 5000) town where the main street is really named Main Street, and in addition, is made of brick, and cars park down the middle as well as along the edges. The business section of town is located on both sides of Main Street, and extends all of three blocks. A lot of town business is conducted in the downtown cafe, and if you know the newspaper editor then you never have to worry about any bad news concerning you getting published in Bagby.

## Brief History of the HRC

The history of this unique facility is tied to that of the former high school principal turned assistant superintendent of the Bagby school district, M. T. Byers -- the man with the dream. Actually, the original impetus for what turned into the HRC project

was prosaic in the extreme: in 1976 the school district needed a new middle school and had neither the money to pay for one, nor the hope of getting a bond issue passed. Consequently the superintendent, Patrick Kniegh, made Byers his assistant in order to look for some alternative methods of funding schools. Byers had become intrigued with the community school concept and the possibility of joint occupancy of public buildings. He had also become aware that the federal government was establishing Public Works grants in the spirit of the old WPA. Byers and the superintendent presented all of this to the Board of Education and asked for permission to pursue the grant idea, which would include the community school and joint occupancy facets.

As Byers explained first to the school board and later in the grant narrative, the idea for the Human Resources Center was rooted in the idea of the Community School, "a community resource whose curriculum is based upon the needs of the community." The basic concept was that the school facilities were owned by the community as a whole, and therefore should be of use to the entire community, not solely to school-age children. Additionally, opening up the school to the community was seen as an act of accountability on the part of the school -- "It is difficult to hide when the doors are open and the lights are on." Community Schools were to be open "18 hours a day, 12 months a year", and provide "educational opportunities to all persons in the community not just those 5 to 18 years of age."

The Bagby project also had a rationale involving joint use of facilities by public agencies. In such circumstances it was felt the building tenants could "provide better services to the public by voluntary cooperation, and the sharing of personnel and facilities among the several agencies." The specific project proposed in Bagby was to be a "shopping center of human services", and included the Public Library, Middle School (grades 5-8), offices for the "County Health and Mental Health Services, County Youth Services, Community Help, several joint-use and public-use facilities -- such as a meeting room, civic auditorium, cafeteria/gym, as well as serving...in the area of Adult Education." A full program of Adult Basic Education, Continuing Education, and Community Education was anticipated for the new facility, in addition to recreational opportunities for the community in the middle school gym.

The dream aspect of the project is well conveyed in the idealistic language of the final three paragraphs of the project narrative:

> The rationale behind the proposed "Bagby Human Resources Center" involves the idea that several agencies could be housed in the same facility, provide better services to the public by voluntary cooperation, and the sharing of personnel and facilities among the several agencies.
>
> Tomorrow's school must fact the problem of educating the "hard-core" unemployed and under-employed. The Bagby

Human Resources Center offers to [this area of the state] an organizational structure that will be able to confront this great social and economic problem, by focusing the multiplicity of resources available among the numerous agencies housed in this facility...toward solving these problems.

In addition, this center should direct some of its energies to serving and allowing the community to be served by its senior citizens. A large reservoir of largely untapped talent exists in the senior citizens of this country, and they could have the opportunity to serve as leaders and teachers in programs of crafts, home skills, history, and special interest fields. They could also have the opportunity to share a nutritionally balanced meal in the company of friends of all ages. In this way, both school age students and seniors can share in the benefits both groups have to offer.

What are the possibilities for this project? They are virtually unlimited, except by the vision and foresight of the personnel involved. Bagby Human Resources Center can actually become a place where "LIVING AND LEARNING GET TOGETHER".

Joint occupancy of the facility by several community service agencies was presented as a savings to the taxpayer, while the community school was tied into both fiscal accountability (the school would not stand vacant outside of regular school hours) and

community mindedness (the HRC would be a life-long learning center and a referral service and source of empowerment for the unemployed). Permission was granted by the Board of Education to pursue the federal funding.

Visits with other local agencies were fruitful as well. Byers spoke to the Bagby Chamber of Commerce, the City Council and numerous citizens of Bagby, outlining the philosophy behind the project and his vision of what it could be, and all were excited about and supportive of the HRC idea.

Byers' vision was clearly articulated during the initial development of the HRC, and was published in several outlets (both local and national) as well as presented to various community groups. Specifically, his dream for the Bagby HRC included all of the following aspects:

1. the community would use the 400 seat school auditorium for concerts, plays and other cultural productions;

2. community fitness classes would be conducted in the school gymnasium both before and after regular school hours;

3. the school facilities would be used after school hours for community education, to include adult basic education as well as arts and crafts;

4. senior citizens would be able to eat a hot lunch in the cafeteria with the students at noon, and would be employed as arts and crafts instructors for the community;

5. the community meeting room would be used for a meeting place for local clubs, as well as a space for art exhibits and community education;

6. the combination public/school library would provide a variety of referral services for community needs, as well as being a place where children and adults could interact and benefit from one another.

In the end, the public library, Health Department, Board of Education, and Community Help (a community action agency) agreed to be included in the project. The agreement was that the school board would own the facility, and the agencies would hold annually renewable leases for their space. Payments would be pro-rated on the basis of floor space and time usage to provide for differences in maintenance and utilities costs.

The grant application was filed October 28, 1976. On December 22, Byers received a call from his senator in Washington D.C. informing him that not only was Bagby going to get the grant, but that it was the largest one awarded in the state. There were 37 projects funded in the state (from over 400 applications submitted), and Bagby got 10% of the total amount of money granted statewide.

Groundbreaking was held March 13, 1977 with visiting state dignitaries, two ministers, and the Bagby High School Choraliers. M. T. Byers was on the program to explain the goals and objectives of the Human Resources Center. The actual occupation of the building took place in April of 1978, and roughly a year later M.

T. Byers took a position as superintendent of a neighboring school district.

## The Reality

It is now over ten years since the Bagby Human Resources Center opened its doors, well past the five years which Byers expected it to take to realize its potential in the community. As described in the prologue, few people in the community know it by the name Byers wished it to be called, although that is the only name which appears on the front of the building.

The HRC does house the library, middle school, community meeting room, Board of Education, and the Public Health Department, but that is about the extent to which the initial vision has been fulfilled. The reality, taken point by point as was the dream, is described below:

1. The "400 seat auditorium" looks like a gym with a concrete floor. Due to cost overruns with the heating and air-conditioning for the HRC, the auditorium has never been completed according to the original plans. There is no seating except for some bleachers at one end. It is primarily used as a school cafeteria and multipurpose room. It is used as a meeting place for Girl Scouts, and occasionally a community group may have a dinner there, but nothing has ever been held in the auditorium for the community's benefit or enjoyment.

2. The gymnasium is never used before school, and it was used after school only once when one of the teachers offered an aerobics class there for the other school teachers. The community has

another gym at the other end of town. One community education director attempted to schedule classes in the gym after school hours, on weekends, and during the summer, but the middle school principal told her he did not want "his" building messed up.

3. No community education of any kind is conducted at the HRC. There are no adult basic education classes, no arts and crafts, no classes whatsoever. For perhaps the first six of the twelve years since the HRC was built there was a functioning community education program in Bagby. However, during at least four of those six years the high school downtown was used as the base rather than the HRC. This was due to a combination of the HRC's distance from the heart of town and the uncooperative nature of the middle school principal.

4. The senior citizens do not eat lunch in the school cafeteria, and since there are no arts and crafts classes, the seniors obviously do not teach anything either. As it turns out, the senior citizen program is housed right downtown in what used to be the old library building. They took the building over as soon as the library moved to the HRC, and they operate their own lunch program on-site as well as Meals on Wheels for shut-ins.

5. The community meeting room is scheduled by the librarians. Priority in the use of the room is given to the agencies which occupy the HRC, and other groups may not hold meetings there on a regular basis, nor may they schedule more than one meeting at a time. The library uses the room to show pre-school films, have story hour, and other things of a similar nature. The Board of

Education holds its meetings there. Other groups who have scheduled the room include the Highway Patrol (for driving classes), Girl Scouts, and the Bagby China Painting Club among others. Although the room is equipped with special hardware and lighting especially for art exhibits there have been none held there in the last eight years or more, despite an active Arts Council that holds a very successful Arts Festival every year in town.

6. The library has no referral services of any kind. Nor do the children have unlimited opportunities to mix with adults, for the school library is relegated to the back of the building, and during school hours the children are not normally allowed up front. The library opens at 9 a.m. and closes at 6 p.m. (5 p.m. on Fridays, 1 p.m. on Saturdays) and is closed on Sunday. During my days of observation in the library, it seemed that more people came there to make photocopies than to check out books (they offer the cheapest copies in town), although there was a fairly high-volume paperback trade. There was very little interaction among patrons or between patrons and librarians.

## The Problem

What happened at the Bagby Human Resources Center, or in Bagby more generally, that resulted in such a disparity between the dream and reality? In a sense, there is no one answer to this question. The data collected from hours of observations, document analysis, and unstructured interviews could be interpreted several different ways depending upon the mindset of those doing the interpreting.

Unfortunately, in a short paper such as this it is impossible to provide enough of the raw data even to substantiate fully the author's conclusions, much less allow readers to construct their own versions of "truth". For those readers who find this short treatment unsatisfactory, a fuller description of the Bagby HRC project can be found in Aagaard (1989).

## What Went Wrong

There seem to have been three major factors which intertwined to keep the HRC reality from matching the dream for it:

1. The agencies occupying the HRC never formed a unified, cooperative whole; they remained essentially separate although they shared the building.

2. The location of the HRC on the north edge of town prohibited casual drop-in community use of the building and also made important social services almost inaccessible to the poor in the south part of Bagby.

3. The community citizens were not sufficiently involved with the HRC concept and planning, thus they were apathetic instead of enthusiastic. Enthusiasm and ownership on the part of the community members might have overcome the first two factors and made some part of the philosophical dream for the HRC come true.

## Lack of Organizational Identity

Twelve years after its Open House, the Bagby Human Resources Center building is a reality, but the dream of interagency cooperation envisioned by M. T. Byers and articulated in the project narrative of the grant is all but forgotten. It seems that

the whole is no more than the sum of the parts which are constituents of the HRC. Indeed the building is seldom even referred to as the Human Resources Center, but rather as "the library" or "the school," depending upon the speaker.

Current principal Ned Wells was of the opinion that the building as a whole was completely identified with the school:

> Wells: It says Human Resources Center, but you know when you ask somebody, they don't tell you they're going to the health department to get a shot or to take their baby -- they're going to the school. ... Yeah, it's the school -- this is the school. Well, you know, "If I don't have money, where do I take my baby?" "Take them out to the school." "Go to the front of the school." "Turn right when you get into the -- ", I've heard those directions! ... It's not the Human Resource Center, it's not the health department -- "Go to the school." ... When you're in this building you're identified with the school, whether you're the psychologist, you know, from the state that's up in the front, or the health department, or if you work in the library, you know, or whatever, you're just identified with the school. You know, uh, the county health inspector, you know, I mean, ask him where he is, well, he works at the school. ... In fact, the people who benefit the most out of this whole deal is the middle school. They're like the heart of this building, and everybody else is just a main

artery. Even though we're functioning together as a whole to support one another, we're really the heart of this deal, and I just see the rest of them as main arteries, you know. Because when it all comes down to it, they're actually feeding this school. (11/29/88)

On the contrary, the librarians tended to feel that everyone knew the building as the library. Sandy Parents, head librarian, explained her view in the following interview excerpt.

Parents: Very often when someone has planned a meeting here and they advertise it in the paper, they say "the library," "the meeting room at the library" is how they put it. The Human Resources Center doesn't come into it. And we just -- a week or two ago, or longer than that, the hospital made arrangements to have a meeting over here and I was talking to the administrator ... and he...asked me how they should, how he should put it. He thought everybody would know where the library was, but he wasn't sure they would know about the Human Resources Center, and I said "Well, it doesn't really matter, do it the way you want to do. But there are a lot of people who do say 'at the library' for those meetings and they know how to get here." ... But that's OK, that means we really made our stamp on the building here -- we're the library now. (6/23/88)

Parents' opinion was confirmed by perusal of the newspaper and direct observation in downtown Bagby. In the early years of the

HRC, perhaps up through 1980, the Bagby Weekly articles referred to "the community room of the Human Resources Center." But subsequent to that there was a gradual shift to referring to it as "the meeting room at the library." And as reported in the prologue, few citizens in downtown Bagby could direct an enquiring stranger to the Human Resources Center.

A big part of the reason the building is not called the Human Resources Center by the citizens of Bagby seems to be that no effort was ever made to unify the agencies in any way, such as a central switchboard for the HRC, or a central building information phone number. According to librarian Sandy Parents there has never been so much as a heading or entry for the HRC in the phone book -- each agency is listed separately, and there is no way to transfer calls internally. Thus the Human Resources Center in Bagby is really a nonentity -- that name appears on the outside of the building, but there is no organization to go with the name.

## Loss of the City Center

Even if Byers' dream of interagency cooperation had come true, and there had been a concerted joint effort of the building occupants to create a true Human Resources Center, its very location mitigated against its success. To truly be a community center, the building should be situated in a location where all community members are equally able to avail themselves of the services offered, and where there is likely to be a concentration of people. This would seem to imply downtown.

It used to be that most of the important community buildings and operations were contained in a square mile of downtown Bagby. Previous to the decade of the 70's, all of the schools, the hospital, doctors' offices, swimming pool, library, public health department, city offices, courthouse, police and fire departments, and the banks were all contained in that one square mile, with most of them in the central four blocks of downtown.

Beginning in 1970, however, Bagby began expanding. In 1970 a new hospital was completed in extreme north Bagby, and plans were approved for Bagby's first shopping center (south on the old state highway), and a new multi-purpose recreational center in extreme southwest Bagby. When the hospital moved it took many of the doctors north with it, although a few stayed in offices downtown for several more years. But eventually the building which had housed the doctors on President Street was sold also, the doctors moved north to be closer to the hospital, and a bank moved into their old building.

The new multi-purpose recreational center opened in 1972, with a swimming pool, gymnasium/auditorium, kitchen, meeting rooms, and tennis courts. It is situated two miles south of Main Street, and half a mile west of the old highway, which puts it across the interstate. In the same location already were the city lake and park, community baseball diamond, golf course and airport. The old swimming pool had been half a mile north of Main Street on top of North Hill -- an easy walk or bike ride along residential streets for most of Bagby's children. To get to the new swimming pool is

more difficult. Residential streets do not go that far south, so children have to walk or bike two miles down the old state highway, which is quite busy with car traffic. There was some dissatisfaction with this new location, as evidenced in this cryptic quote from an editorial in the October 28, 1971 Bagby Daily:

> The new all purpose facility will add attraction to the entire community. Some express the wish that the facility could have been constructed somewhere in downtown Bagby, but the decision to locate the facility at City Park must have been based on factors not generally known to other citizens of Bagby.

The high school was (and is) one block south of Main Street, and truly could be considered to be right downtown. About six blocks south of the high school was the old South elementary school, while the North elementary school was about two blocks north and one block west of the high school. Even though the elementary schools were commonly referred to by directional names they were literally within ten blocks of each other, and the high school was in between them. After some discussion by the school board in the spring and summer of 1974 about reorganizing the elementary program (including the possibility of grades 1 and 2 being located at the South school and grades 3-6 at the North school), a bond issue was approved in November, 1974, to build a new elementary school which consolidated the existing two. It is

this new consolidated elementary school that serves the children of Bagby today.

The new elementary school was built on land which the school district had purchased in the far north part of town. There is some feeling in Bagby that this new school and its location led to increased class and racial integration of the town, both through an equalization of the educational opportunities and physical integration of the northern neighborhoods.

Finally, the Human Resources Center took the library, public health department, Youth and Family Services, the Board of Education and the middle school out of downtown and joined the elementary school in the northwest section of Bagby. Additionally, in the last year the welfare department has moved from its former central location in the courthouse to far south Bagby.

This flurry of relocations has not gone unrecognized by the Bagby citizens, although there are differing opinions on the wisdom of completely deserting downtown. The citizens finally called a halt to the flight from the center after the high school burned and the school board wanted to relocate it out north of town by the HRC and elementary school. That suggestion was soundly defeated at the polls. Former middle school principal Mitchell Capp and his wife Helen, while explaining that the thought of losing the high school from downtown was just too much for most people, also revealed a prevailing attitude about the inevitability of the demise of downtown Bagby:

Helen: Well, the high school down there, back when it burned, Main Street couldn't stand the thought of it not being there anymore.

Capp: Well, I think that Main Street, if you want to call it that --

Helen: Of course, there's not much left of Main Street now.

Capp: Main Street is gradually vanishing. It's going to be gone, in what, another 20 years? (6/7/88)

Public health clerk Eunice Holland also mentioned that downtown was losing its importance to people. She said that with the hospital, doctors, and a shopping center in the north part of town, a lot of senior citizens had moved up to that end of Bagby and "they never have to go downtown anymore" (2/24/89). If that is true, then perhaps the Senior Citizens Center will be the next agency to leave downtown and relocate on the edges.

William H. Whyte in his recent (1988) book entitled City: Rediscovering the Center, discussed the propensity for cities to build up their outer edges at the expense of the central downtown area. After years of studying cities, Whyte speaks disapprovingly of this trend:

> Smaller cities tend to have quite low densities in their downtowns. ... The problem is the distribution of people. Whatever the total number in the metropolitan area, the number in downtown is the crux. In many cases

there are simply not enough people to make the place work right (p. 311).

> Many cities compound their problems by the way they distribute what people they do have. They fail to concentrate. Instead they diffuse. They spread over a large area what would work were it concentrated in a small one. Pedestrian malls are an example. ... Another kind of diffusion is the creation of new downtown centers away from the center. Land assembly is often easier and cheaper on the edge of downtown, and sometimes there is a very large open site available. If a satellite downtown is built there, proponents say, in time there will be development of the space between, and the two downtowns will be united. But they probably will not. ... Even a few blocks can be a divisive distance (p. 312).

The HRC is located at least a mile and a half north and west of downtown Bagby -- a distance that makes it difficult to casually drop in on the library or health department when one is doing other business in town, and a prohibitive distance if you live in south Bagby and do not have a car. Because all of the agencies in the building used to be right downtown, the HRC was in essence what Whyte described above as "a downtown center away from the center." The irony of it is that while the HRC propaganda was claiming that the building would broaden the social service offerings to the community, it actually made the existing services less convenient.

## Unequal Access

The northern location of the Human Resources Center is all the more problematic when one realizes that the north end of Bagby is a more affluent section compared to the south end, a fact that has led to some concern over equal access to the services provided at the HRC. Indeed, the access problem was on the minds of several when the HRC was first proposed, and it contributed to the decision of Isaac Farat, Community Help director, not to move his office from downtown to the HRC. In the following interview excerpt Farat discussed his anxieties about moving his agency.

> L: Well then tell me, if there had really been enough space at the Human Resources Center, would you have really moved out there?
>
> Farat: Uh, that's a question that has haunted me by even my staff. My staff wanted me to move out there because it was clean facilities and rug on the floor and nice offices and all that. But again I was worried about the people I'm supposed to be serving. Would they be able to get out there and receive the services? I'm centrally located here,...I'm right in the center of town,...I'm one block from the courthouse.... So I think we need to be in an area where people can come that we're going to serve.... (11/29/88)

Although it has already been mentioned that the north end of Bagby is somewhat more integrated racially since the elementary schools were consolidated into one northern location, there was

still an undercurrent of feeling that the HRC was not serving the various minorities equally with the white middle class. A former resident of Bagby, back in town for the High School reunion, wrote a letter to the editor in the July 13, 1978, Bagby Weekly harshly criticizing the town for, among other things, the location of the HRC:

> The town seems to have deteriorated, and causes are always difficult to pinpoint. However, the root problem, other than a general lack of social consciousness, seems to be the blatant disregard by the middle class for the community as a whole. A prime example is the new Human Resources Center. Although a fine building, its location is such that one must conclude that it was built by and for the middle class with a complete disregard for the young, the poor, the elderly and the blacks. It is racist and blind to community needs. Likewise the swimming pool. Both are located in areas far removed from the center of the community and close (probably not coincidentally) to the middle and upper class sections. ... Children and senior citizens must be driven to schools, recreation and the library. Locating community services in inaccessible areas does more to destroy a community than any other single factor, plus placing heavy reliance on the automobile, certainly an ecologically disastrous idea. Downtown is already being

destroyed by the automobile and outlying shopping centers.

Bagby was never a beautiful town, but it once had the potential both for beauty and progress. It is a shame that is has so thoughtlessly ignored its possibilities.

This view of Bagby received some support from former public health nurse Elizabeth Straws. In discussing other possible locations for the Human Resources Center which might have been more accessible, she pointed out that the old South school building and the surrounding area was available just six blocks south of downtown. The problem was that it was <u>south</u> of town:

Straws: We probably could have built on to it [the old South school building] and done more, and had more, actually more space down there. You know, more access to get surrounding land and all to build and expand in that area than you did up here. But people would never have accepted it.

L: Do you think there would have been enough space to put something like this down there, at that site?

Straws: Well, I don't know. There might have been, but it would never have been accepted. People would <u>not</u> have gone to the South school. People that live in the north part of town wouldn't have gone down there to the library, and probably, probably it would not have worked. (2/15/89)

So as it stands now, with the HRC in the north part of town, some people in the south of Bagby do not have access to it due to lack of transportation. Yet if the HRC had been built where the south citizens could reach it, then (according to Straws) the northerners would not have patronized it. It seems that the downtown area would have been the only mutually agreeable location. However, according to principal Ned Wells, lack of available space would have made building downtown difficult.

> Wells: Probably, in all honesty, the best location is where Community Help is at the old hospital, because it's kind of in the central part of this whole town, you know. But you go and try and buy property down in that area, because you're going to have to move homes to get property. ... So you would have gone down and buy up some of those homes that are worth $5,000-10,000, true? I mean that's the homes you've got to buy. Well those are the very homes that those people are living in [that you want to serve with the HRC]. Just, well I'll give you an example --they built National Burgers. You know, as a result of National Burgers there were four elderly people that had to totally relocate.
>
> L: They put people out of their homes to build National Burger?
>
> Wells: Well yeah, they bought that corner. those were all old homes there, right? Well those were elderly people living in those real old homes, they were rent

houses, but that had been their home for years, they just kept renting. So they had to relocate. ... Because you've got to buy what's most affordable and those people that have to move are the very ones [you're trying to serve]. (11/29/88)

Given that limitation on land in the central district of Bagby it is understandable why the Human Resources Center was built so far from downtown. However, there is no evidence that the planning committee ever considered and rejected a downtown site, rather it seems they never seriously considered it until they were asked about it twelve years later. It is true that there are not enough empty buildings in the area to be able to construct an edifice like the current HRC without evicting people. But to be in the center -- the center of the community, the center of racial and class tension, the center of citizens' lives -- it might have been worthwhile to consider a scaled down version rather than the alternative of grandeur (Smith & Keith, 1967).

## Lack of Community Involvement

Agency separatism and struggles over location are themes that emerge over and over in the case studies and reports of similar community centers across the nation. Parson and Dudley (1982) studied three community schools, which were three, six, and twelve years old; Baillie, DeWitt, and O'Leary (1972) examined ten community centers in various areas such as New York, Michigan, Atlanta, and Connecticut; Bloss (1969) reported on library neighborhood centers in New Haven, Connecticut; Fletcher (1983)

compiled what he called a biography of a community center in England that had been in operation for twelve years -- every report mentions the difficulty in choosing a location, and the struggles to unite diverse agencies under one roof, as well as the necessity of having a strong individual or group advocate to put the project in motion.

Some of the centers are no longer in operation, but some, even though in non-central locations or still lacking inter-agency cooperation, are doing extremely well and are self-supporting. The striking commonality of those that continue to operate without external grant funding is their emphasis on community participation in the planning and operation of the project. At each successful site there is a constituency that is convinced of the value of the program. (Baillie, DeWitt, & O'Leary, 1972, p.14)

That is what Bagby lacks -- a convinced constituency. They are not unhappy about the HRC, they just never bought into the community education concept. Unfortunately, the typical approach to establishing a community education program is top down:

> ... a principal, school board chairman, or superintendent becomes excited about the idea and "sells" it to those who control the public school and its resources. Teachers, other school staff, community leaders, and agencies are invited to "buy in". The public is surveyed. Funding is secured. Someone is hired as director. An advisory council is appointed. Classes are

organized. And another "Community School" opens its doors to the public (Fried, 1980, p. 1).

## Bagby's Approach

Many community center projects claim to incorporate citizen participation in planning, and Bagby was no exception. Byers said that they had "public hearings, and had people give...all kinds of input," but when somebody who had attended the hearing criticized the outcome of the building, then Byers' stand was "...we didn't even do the things I wanted to do, and I was in charge of it. How are we going to do what they want to do?" (11/10/86)

In the final analysis, the participation afforded the community was often symbolic and seemed to be "aimed at co-optation and control" (Baillie, DeWitt, & O'Leary, 1972, p. 51). Other projects have done the same thing, even to the point of asking parents, students, administration and faculty for design ideas for a new community center building (Ryder, 1974), but it is a dangerous practice if you do not really want people's complete involvement, because

> ...once begun, engagement [of citizens in community decision making] is not something that can readily be turned off or manipulated to some predetermined end. ... It will not take long, either, for at least some in the community to sense it if the process of participation is not genuine. To attempt a pro forma engagement process with the idea of obtaining sanction without giving some

options is to risk a schism that well wreck sound and basically acceptable plans (Seaver, 1976, p. 341).

That may be part of the reason why so few projects really engage the community. But from a purely practical standpoint, participatory planning takes time -- time for meetings, time for bickering, time for dealing with the inexperienced, perhaps time for retraining of the professionals so that they can work with the public (Ringers, 1981). Every report of community center projects mentioned the time involved in working with citizens, and cautioned not to underestimate the time needed for that phase of the project (Parson & Dudley, 1982; Baillie, DeWitt, & O'Leary, 1972; Bloss, 1969; Fletcher, 1983; Fried, 1980).

To be fair, Bagby simply did not have the luxury of time if they were to meet the grant deadline, and that may have contributed to the lack of planned citizen involvement in the project. However, after their study of three community schools, Parson and Dudley (1982) were unimpressed with the record of public schools' encouraging citizen participation:

> ...the goal of a democratic process in community education is one that may be unattainable in most traditional school based projects. ... Public schools, while they typically espouse the rhetoric of citizen participation, the record tends to reveal more talk than action. ... ...community education is helping public schools to open themselves to the community...[but] the goal of citizens' involvement in community development

and problem-solving...may be unrealistic as a major goal of the "ideal" community education program (p. 9).

Since the Bagby HRC is owned and operated by the school board, it may be yet another example of Parson and Dudley's point. Citizen participation was not included as a goal in the grant narrative, although it did decry the "impersonalization between those serving and those being served" (p. 2). Likewise it did not use the language of radicalism, but espoused radical goals such as confronting the "great social and economic problem" (p. 3) of unemployment. However, the solution given for this great problem was to help adults "attain a high school diploma, or continue and further their educational training" (p. 3).

The HRC was planned to be "a community resource whose curriculum is based upon the needs of the community", and yet no one asked the community what those needs were. The only educational training that occurred was recreational, and the community <u>was</u> surveyed for input on those courses. It is all scary confirmation of Alinsky's raging of 43 years ago:

> Jobs, higher wages, economic security, housing, and health are some of the important things in life; and they are all controversial. These issues must be met squarely, courageously, and militantly. You don't, you dare not, come to a people who are unemployed, who don't know where their next meal is coming from, whose children and themselves are in the gutter of despair -- and offer them not food, not jobs, not security, but supervised

recreation, handicraft classes and character building! Yet that is what is done! Instead of a little bread and butter we come to them with plenty of bats and balls! (1946, p. 82, emphasis in the original)

In the final analysis, it has to be concluded that the Bagby HRC was not really set up to serve the whole community. The political reality of the situation was that Byers had guaranteed the school board that he could bring enough grant money into the school district to justify his position as assistant superintendent. The school district needed a new middle school, and as former superintendent Patrick Kniegh indicated so candidly, "...in order to get the money you had to involve the community..." (7/14/88). The other aspects were included because they would "...look well on the application, as far as community involvement .... Through looking at what looked good and Bagby needed as far as the schools and the library, we came up with uh, that type of an organization" (Kniegh, 7/14/88). This explanation helps to reconcile the lack of congruence between the stated goals and the actions of the planners.

For instance, the HRC was to centralize social service agencies in order to better serve the needy, yet its location made access to those services more difficult. The agencies were to be integrated into a cohesive whole, yet there was no HRC director or coordination of any kind. It was to be a community center, yet the community areas of the building -- the entrance hall, the gym, and the auditorium -- were respectively inhospitable (no seating),

unavailable, or uncompleted. It was built ostensibly for the people, yet the people had no real say in what went into it, where it was, or how it operated.

## The Paradox

In retrospect, Byers can hardly be blamed for following the top-down theory of establishing a community center and a community education program. Most of the community education texts assure aspiring C.E. directors that things move From Program to Process to Practice, as reads part of the title to Minzey and LeTarte's 1979 text. Unfortunately, case studies show that most top-down C.E. projects continue to do-for people rather than doing-with -- they remain stuck at the program level even 12 years after inception (Parson & Dudley, 1982).

Bagby, in this regard, is only a small example of what is happening in adult and community education in general with regard to the lack of practical application of critical theory. This lack of application is closely linked to linked to the nature of professions.

Individual or community development and community action hinge on the assumption that individuals and communities have a sense of themselves, that they are ready and able to act (Boyte, 1984). This is by no means a warranted assumption. This state of helplessness, which is a great impediment to social change, has largely been caused by the nature and proliferation of "helping" professions and institutions.

> The growth of large-scale institutions has been accompanied by legitimizing ideologies that consciously seek to erode the authority of communal relations. ... The emergencé of the modern welfare state has meant the rise of professions that reduce laymen to incompetence and to dependence on experts (Boyte, 1984, p. 33).

The education profession is as full of experts who look down on lay people as the medical profession and a multitude of others. This may be an unavoidable result of an area becoming a "profession". In the eyes of most people the ability of a lay person to make excellent widgets obviates the need for a professional widget maker. Therefore if you wish to go into widget making professionally, you necessarily have to denigrate the skill of the lay people and tell them that to get really good widgets they will have to come to you.

Unfortunately, this process in the profession of education involves telling people that they can <u>know</u> nothing on their own, and thus must buy their knowledge from professional educators. This reliance on experts is reinforced by educational methods that do not help students to think for themselves, but rather teach them to do what they are told. John Gatto, who was recently named New York City's Teacher of the Year, plainly states that "schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders (1990, p.73)." Gatto is only reiterating what was a common theme for 1960's radicals such as Farber (1970) or Van Norman (1966). Individuals who make it through twelve years of compulsory schooling in this

country (not to mention four to six more years of college) have learned to do things the way the teacher wants. "Freshmen come up to me with an essay and ask if I want it folded, and whether their name should be in the upper right hand corner" (Farber, 1970, p.92).

Where a name should go on a paper is a small example of the mindlessness instilled in students through institutionalized education. Freire (1985) and Van Norman (1969) both spoke to the larger political issues involved, issues that seem to be the same regardless of the culture of the educational system.

Shaull, in his foreword to a 1985 version of Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, describes Freire's epiphany regarding this point:

> His early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the "culture of silence" of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination--and of the paternalism--of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept "submerged" in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible. And it became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence (p. 10, 11).

Van Norman, although using different language, spoke to the same point:

> Is it not ironical that in a planned society of controlled workers given compulsory assignments, where religious expression is suppressed, the press controlled, and all media of communication censored, where a puppet government is encouraged but denied any real authority, where great attention is given to efficiency and character reports, and attendance at cultural assemblies is compulsory, where it is avowed that all will be administered to each according to his needs and performance required from each according to his abilities, and where those who flee are tracked down, returned, and punished for trying to escape--in short in the milieu of the typical large American secondary school--we attempt to teach "the democratic system"? (1966, p.315-16)

The products of this kind of educational system are the very individuals to whom, years later, adult and community educators wish to apply the concepts of andragogy. What makes us think that these individuals have somewhere along the line undergone a sea change and become independent, self-directed learners? Many of the institutions for which our students work value the unquestioning order-following mentality that school established, so there is little opportunity or incentive to become internally directed in the post-school years.

> Employers do not want workers who think for themselves or who demand and deserve raises and advancement. ... Scholarly inquiries have only documented what bosses and workers know in daily life -- the more you can think and the more you can

do, the less you can stand the work you're doing. Workers are alienated enough when their technical skills exceed what the job asks them to do; they get even more resistant when they feel as bright as the elite (Shor, 1987, p.24, 28).

We are fooling ourselves and doing a disservice to the students or community members by not recognizing the situation as it is. Institutional employees or professionals who claim that their major purpose is to enable the laity are living oxymora. If they did indeed accomplish their stated purpose then they would have essentially "de-professionalized" themselves and probably would be out of a job -- either because there were no unempowered clients remaining or because they (the erstwhile professionals) were fired for disloyalty to their organization. For the most part, empowerment is antithetical to the goals of most organizations, both business and other kinds.

In this sense the idea of community schools was doomed from the very beginning due to the anti-empowerment history of schools in general. To expect a school administrator to allow the community to make plans for the use of a school building would be like expecting a warden to allow the prisoners to run the penitentiary. Because in Bagby the community education program was tied to the school system, indeed the community education directors were always school employees, real community involvement and thus empowerment was not even considered, much less possible.

I do not mean to imply that Byers or his colleagues who were associated with the Bagby project were intentionally perpetuating

social injustice, but that they simply were operating under the assumptions of the institutions for which they worked. The Bagby leaders were like the "converts" Freire (1985) writes about, who:

> ... truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change (p.46).

## Conclusions

The case of the Bagby Human Resources Center can be seen as a cautionary illustration for the radically-minded within education in general, and adult and community education in particular. The continuing deluge of writings on critical theory does not seem to have changed the actual practice of education very much, if at all.

Perhaps those of us who work for institutions have unconsciously internalized "the boss", in Freire's terms. We are like beginning classroom teachers who, faced with a room full of third graders, forget everything they were told in teacher education classes and revert to teaching the way they were taught when they were in third grade. Rather than truly <u>being</u> radicals we only possess a radical vocabulary. This is what Freire (1985) referred to as an "armchair revolution" (p.53), the unacceptable substitute for praxis, which is the application of the revolutionary ideas.

To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks

this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions (Freire, 1985, p.53).

In addition to trust, real praxis may require a reconceptualization of professionalism, or at least an awareness that adult education cannot be considered a profession in the current sense of the term and still be an effective empowerment agent. We cannot continue to claim that we are striving to enable adults to help themselves when we are simultaneously endeavoring to build "a sufficient body of specialized knowledge and technique to justify the assertion that adult education is a credible field of professional specialization" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p.31).

To take this one step further, perhaps we need to boldly go where Miles Horton has gone before. It may be that real praxis also may require a separation of empowerment-oriented adult education from existing institutions, so that our espoused empowerment goals will not continue to be sabotaged by institutional survival instincts.

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